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MAY 1999 • \$2.95

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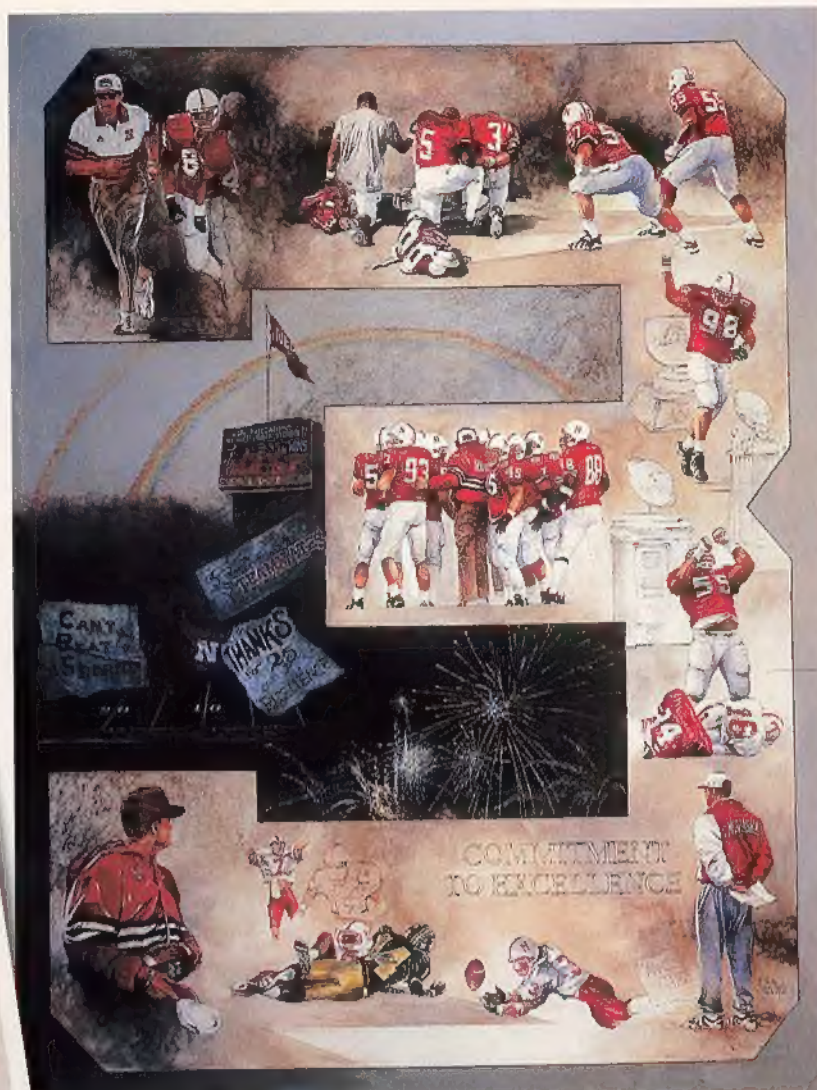
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The Nebraska defense continued its strong spring performance by dominating in the annual Spring Game. By Mike Babcock

16 Weakside linebacker Randy Stella was one of the young Huskers who had a promising spring.

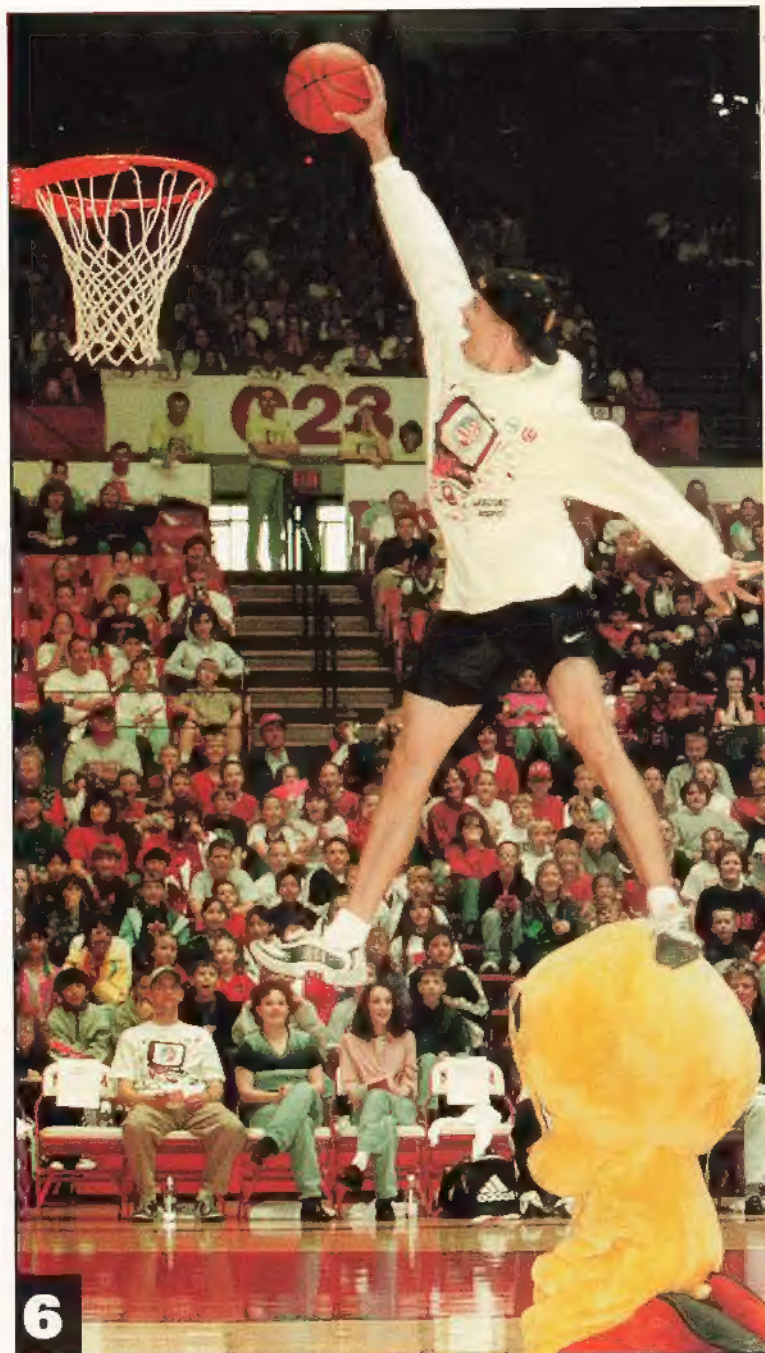
18 Complete Spring Game statistics.

On The Cover

Rover Wes Woodward battles tight end Tracey Wistrom for a pass during the Red-White Spring Game April 17. Photo by Scott Bruhn

NEXT ISSUE

1999 Football Preview should mail around June 5, 1999.



'School Is Cool' Jam

Nebraska senior high jumper Shane Lavy demonstrates his dunking ability during the eighth annual "School is Cool" Jam April 12 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Photo by Scott Bruhn

Stress The Positive

A friend in Nebraska just sent me an article on the "School is Cool" Jam held recently.

It was refreshing to see some coverage of a positive event like this, with thousands of kids in attendance. I know the media must report the bad things about our athletes, too. However, in my opinion, the negative things get much more attention than the positive.

I understand that all athletes are not or do not want to be role models, but we should celebrate the good deeds of the ones who are. The athletes who participate in things like this "School is Cool" event are to be congratulated, as well as all those who find time in their busy college schedules to make the special academic teams.

The national media seems to have a field day when a Nebraska athlete messes up. No one hears about the good things they do off the field or court.

Joe Thompson,
Chicago, Ill.

More than 13,000 students from more than 200 Nebraska schools attended the eighth annual "School is Cool" event April 12 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center in Lincoln. Photos from this year's event are on Pages 2 and 6 in this issue. — Editor

Does Schedule Matter?

I don't care for the BCS Formula, and I tell you why.

Many football fans who dislike Nebraska dwell on our so-called "soft schedule." Do they really believe that we choose to play Akron or Pacific over teams like Michigan? The question is, do teams like Michigan want to play us? Take Nebraska's last national championship, for example. Do they think while Peyton Manning was picking himself off the ground that he thought, "Wow, just think how good these guys would be if they had played somebody!"

My point is, if Nebraska is fortunate to make it to a major bowl game and win, who cares what their schedule was that got them there? What good did a tough schedule do the last three teams we beat in bowl games? I had more faith in the coaches' poll, their sixth sense and knowledge of the game.

Todd Crownover,
Tyndall, S.D.

How About Other Guys?

Thank you for the excellent coverage of Nebraska sports.

The Nebraska transplant numbers are huge here in the four corners of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas. We travel to as many games as possible, but when we can't travel, we listen to KURM 790 AM Radio or Rogers, Ark., which carries the Huskers.

As a longtime subscriber of Huskers Illustrated, my favorite article of all time was "Class Action," April 1995. It broke down the four years of scholarship recruits and told if they were still on the team, injured, transferred, or maybe given up football

altogether because of adversity,

Some times a player we hear so much about at recruiting time doesn't show up for a year or two. While most contribute to the team with little or no adversity, we've lost track of a few recruits and would like to hear about them as well as the ones who have made it to the top.

Fred Holz
Holiday Island, Ark.

Web Site Improves

I've complained in the past about the Huskers Illustrated web site (www.huskersillustrated.com), so I'd like to offer some positive feedback, now that you're apparently updating it on a regular basis.

Thank you for the information you are now posting. I enjoyed the spring football reports and the other information you posted. It helps me keep track of things between issues of Huskers Illustrated. I like some of the other new things you've added, like the links to Nebraska newspapers. That allows some of us transplants to keep up on news from our hometowns, as well as all the Husker-related stuff.

Bob Smith,
Phoenix, Ariz.

Got Something To Say?

Please send your comments and questions to: Letters, 3210 NW 3rd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68521. You can also fax them to us at (402) 474-5132. We reserve the right to edit the letters for clarity, content and length. For those with electronic mail abilities, Hleditor@aol.com.

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Rush End Wins

Vanden Bosch continues tradition with lifter-of-the-year award for 1999

When Jared Tomich won the football team's lifter-of-the-year award in 1996, he told Chad Kelsay, a sophomore at the time, to keep the award with the rush ends.

Kelsay worked hard and won the award two years later, as a senior.

"He said, 'I'm going to tell you the same thing (Tomich told him); keep it with the rush ends,'" Kyle Vanden Bosch said after being chosen lifter of the year for 1999.

The announcement was made on the Saturday of the first major scrimmage of spring practice. And it pleased Vanden Bosch, who was among the finalists for the award a year ago.

"It's like a dream," said the junior-to-be from Larchwood, Iowa.

He participated in Nebraska's summer football camp prior to his junior and senior years at West Lyon Community High School, and "they always talked about how it's probably one of the most important awards you can get because your peers vote on it," he said. "They see you as somebody who is willing to put in the hard work for the team and make the sacrifice, put in the extra time.

"It really means a lot to me that the players look to me as somebody who is working hard."

The other finalists for the award, which has been given since 1974, were defensive back Gregg List, wingback Jeremy Bender, offensive guard James Sherman and center Dominic Raiola.



Newcombe speaks to students

Quarterback Bobby Newcombe speaks to a crowd of more than 13,000 students from more than 200 schools at the eighth annual "School is Cool" Jam April 12 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Other speakers included Coach Frank Solich and wingback Frankie London, assistant softball coach Lori Sippel and pitcher Jenny Voss, and volleyball players Megan Korver and Jaime Krondak.

List and Sherman will be seniors. Bender and Raiola will be sophomores.

"It's a nice individual award," Vanden Bosch said. "But I think it reflects a lot our attitude as a team, to get bigger and stronger, and as a team to go out and physically dominate like we used to."

"Last year, we had teams actually stay with us physically for the first time in several years. We want to go back out next year and punish teams and stick it to them, play after play, like we used to."

Vanden Bosch had the team's best performance index score in post-winter

conditioning testing, and he recorded personal bests in the pro agility run (4.07 seconds) and the vertical jump (34.5 inches).

His squat lift was 551 pounds, and his hang clean was 315 pounds.

Those numbers are a reflection of a dedication that can be traced to when he and his older brother Keith built a weight room in the family garage. They also reflect the support he has received from Aaron Wills, another rush end who "kind of took me in when I came here," said Vanden Bosch.

"He's kind of known as a guy who really gets after it

in the weight room, and he kind of showed me what things to do as far as making you a better football player, and what things not to do.

"I've been lifting with him ever since. It's helped me a lot, I think."

Vanden Bosch was in the rotation last season, backing up Kelsay on the left side. Now he's atop the depth chart on the right side, replacing Mike Rucker, who also completed his eligibility.

Lifter of the year is a meaningful award, according to defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

"That's one of the biggest honors around here because the coaches don't have anything to do with it. It's strictly a players' thing," he said. "To the coaches it means a lot because . . . we aren't in the weight room all the time. We're not over there every minute of the day. We don't see all that stuff."

"It's nice to know who the guys are, like Gregg List and some of these kids that are on defense that aren't maybe starters. They get recognized by the other players for their effort."

"Usually it's hard to pick one particular guy out because all five have really done a great job. So just being nominated by your peers is one of the biggest honors you can have. It's like being elected captain, to me, because we as coaches don't influence anything. It's all their doing."

The rush ends have done it in three of the last four seasons.

I-back Dan Alexander won the award in 1997. ■

Rucker first of 7 taken in NFL Draft

Rush end Mike Rucker was the first of seven Cornhuskers selected during the seven rounds of the National Football League draft the third weekend in April.

The Carolina Panthers picked the 6-foot-6, 260-pound Rucker in the second round. He was the 38th



Mike Rucker

player chosen. The Panthers' first pick in the draft, also in the second round, was Chris Terry, an offensive

lineman from Georgia.

Rucker will join three other former Cornhuskers with the Panthers: Jason Peter, Mike Minter and Donta Jones. Coach George Seifert told ESPN: "As with any great athlete, he does appear to have great movement. It will take time to see where his strengths fit in the overall scheme of things."

The other former Cornhuskers drafted were: Joel Makovicka, fourth round, Arizona Cardinals; Jason Wiltz, fourth round, New York Jets; Jay Foreman, fifth round, Buffalo Bills; Kris Brown, seventh round, Pittsburgh Steelers; and Sheldon Jackson, seventh round, Buffalo Bills.

Kenny Cheatham and Josh Heskew were among those looking to sign as free agents.

Counting the former Nebraska players, 32 from the Big 12 were selected, including six each from Texas A&M and Kansas State. The first conference player to be chosen, of course, was former Texas running back and Heisman Trophy winner Ricky Williams by the New Orleans Saints. ■

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

LEAN AND MEAN

Rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch, the football team's lifter of the year, defensive lineman Jon Clanton, defensive back Clint Finley and center Dominic Raiola established position records for performance index points in post-winter conditioning testing in mid-March.

The position records reflected what Boyd Epley, the Cornhuskers' director of performance, described as possibly the team's most significant six-week increase in lean body mass ever.

On the average, players replaced 10 pounds of fat with 12 pounds of muscle during winter conditioning. The percent of body fat dropped from 14.2 to 9.6 per player. Based on the test results, the average Cornhusker weighs 229 pounds. His vertical jump is 29.46 inches, and he runs the 40-yard dash in 4.96 seconds, the 10-yard dash in 1.71 seconds and the pro-agility drill in 4.18 seconds.

Quarterback Eric Crouch had the fastest 40-yard dash time, a personal-best 4.47 seconds.

"I've definitely gained some strength," said Crouch, who weighed in at "about 200. So I think that might help me out. I need to get stronger and bigger to play this game. That's one thing I've always worked on (since) the first day I walked in the door, getting bigger and getting stronger."

ON TRACK, AND OFF

The Cornhusker track and field teams have been without a home for the outdoor season. The Ed Weir Stadium track is being replaced, in a project expected to take until the fall.

The teams were able to work out on the indoor track at the Bob Devaney Sports Center until mid-April, when work began to replace the 200-meter track there as well.

The new indoor track will include a hydraulically-banked surface.

The construction forced many Cornhuskers to practice crosstown, on the Woody Greeno Track at Nebraska Wesleyan. The outdoor schedule included meets in Arizona, South Carolina, Texas, California, Utah and Oregon. The track renovations will cost a reported \$5 million.

DEVANEY CENTER GETS FACELIFT

The University of Nebraska Board of Regents is expected to consider a proposal that would put HuskerVision replay screens in the Devaney Sports Center arena.

The cost of the replay screens, as well as other improvements at the Sports Center arena and concourses, would be covered by private funds in the form of sponsorships. With sufficient sponsorships, the screens could be installed in time for the 1999-2000 basketball season.

LUE'S DEBUT

Former Cornhusker Tyrone Lue's national television debut with the NBA's Los Angeles Lakers was auspicious. He scored 12 points and was credited with six assists in 23 minutes off the bench during a 106-93 loss to the Utah Jazz at the Great Western Forum in Los Angeles in early April.

The game was telecast by the TNT cable network. Lue, who had just been activated, replaced starting point guard Derek Fisher, who was injured and watched most of the game in street clothes. At one point, TNT analyst and former NBA coach Hubie Brown described Lue as a "rookie sensation."

Lue had played only two minutes prior to the Utah game because of a back injury.

The Lincoln Journal Star did a feature on Lue in mid-March, quoting Lakers assistant Larry Drew as saying Lue "can get from one end of the floor to the other faster than anybody in the league."

Brown reiterated that point during the telecast of the Utah game.

That same night at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, former Cornhusker Eric Piatkowski scored 29 points for the Los Angeles Clippers in an 88-83 loss against the Phoenix Suns.

FRESHMAN FANS 16 IN LOSING EFFORT

Freshman pitcher Shane Komine struck out 16 in 9.2 innings of relief in a 6-5, 16-inning loss at Iowa State in mid-April. Komine absorbed the loss, despite not allowing an earned run. The 16 strikeouts were one short of the school record, set by Brent Frieauff against St. Cloud State on March 24, 1983. Starter Jay Sirianni struck out five as the Cornhuskers set a Big 12 single-game record.

The game was a first of a double-header at Ames, and Iowa State's first conference victory of the season. Nebraska came back to win the second game 9-6 in 10 innings. ■

It Didn't Seem Like A Typical Spring Game

*Work will continue over summer months
for construction crews, Huskers*



**Brian
HILL**

IT HAPPENS every spring . . . but not quite like this.

The game-time temperature was listed at 50 degrees, but it didn't seem that warm. Members of the media noticed because they were outside just like the 29,739 faithful who braved the un-springlike day, even though the game was televised live statewide.

Construction continues on the massive sky box structure, which includes a new press box and almost dwarfs the west stadium, which was not open to fans for this annual coming out party for the next edition of the Nebraska football team.

Much like the new structure, the 1999 Huskers appear to be a work in progress. While the construction must be

complete in time for the Sept. 11 home-opener against California, the Huskers will have to be ready at least a week earlier when they open against Iowa at Iowa City.

With quarterback Eric Crouch wearing a green jersey to make him, for the most part, off limits to contact and 24 players listed as "injured, will not play," it was difficult to get a read on this team. We try to sort things out in this edition, with a look at the Spring Game and events leading up to it. You will also find football recruiting, basketball, baseball, softball, gymnastics and track and field.

To get you through the summer months, we'll have our annual Football Preview, scheduled for early June.

Meanwhile, those on the injured list will continue to rehabilitate, in order to rejoin their teammates when fall practice begins in August.

It won't be long. ■



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Huskers Point In New Direction

Point guard 'by committee' wasn't the answer



Mike BABCOCK

DANNY NEE PAUSED to compliment himself on his characterization of the attempt to play junior Cookie Belcher at point guard this season as the "Cookie experiment."

Nebraska's basketball coach liked the sound of it, if not the result.

"That's kind of good," he said before finishing the thought. "After we gave up on the 'Cookie experiment' and went to Chad Johnson (at the point), I don't know if it

was fixed. We (weren't) that great with Chad Johnson there. So I think it was like putting a Band-Aid on an open sore. Recruiting could help.

"If the recruits are as good as they tell me they are, we have a chance."

If the recruits are as good as their credentials suggest, the Cornhuskers could be Big 12 title contenders, again. In mid-February, remember, they were in that position this season.

They came up short, however, failing even to earn a first-round bye in the conference tournament. And instead of advancing to a second consecutive NCAA Tournament, which seemed almost certain following a stretch in which they won nine-of-10, they ended up playing two games in the NIT.

They won at home. And lost on the road. That's often the case in the NIT.

Part of Nebraska's problem in 1998-99 was depth up-front. And part was uncertainty at point guard because of the departure of Tyrone Lue for the NBA, one season early.

There was bound to be a significant void without Lue. But Nee seemed to think that the Cornhuskers could get by with what he described as a point guard "by committee."

Initially, the core committee included junior college transfer Joe Holmes and redshirted freshman Cary Cochran. Holmes proved to be a steadying influence, handling the ball and distributing it, but he lacked offensive punch. In contrast, Cochran was an offensive threat, a 3-point shooter extraordinaire, but his quickness was suspect and caused significant matchup problems on defense.

"He gave us things, but we also had to give up things in playing him," said Nee.

Regardless of his weaknesses, Cochran was a key figure in the nine-of-10 surge, drawing double-team defenders away from center Venson Hamilton with his usually reliable outside shooting.

Prior to the season, Nee indicated that Todd Smith, another redshirted freshman, might be part of the point guard committee. But he settled on the "Cookie experiment."

The experiment didn't work, mostly because the added responsibility detracted from Belcher's other contributions. Belcher was trying to do too much, and with a severely sprained wrist.

So the "Cookie experiment" was scrapped, in favor of trying Johnson in the rotation at the point, even though Johnson is best as a small forward. Johnson enthusiastically embraced the added duties of his new position, and proved that as a point guard he was . . . well, a good small forward.

The situation deteriorated. Late in the season, Holmes was missing practice because of muscle spasms in his back. "He calls it locked up," Nee said.

The back problem has ended Holmes' Cornhusker career one season early. He will retain his scholarship but have medical exempt status, which means he won't be able to play. In addition, Smith is transferring to a junior college and Johnson is transferring to a school closer to home.

Johnson's unexpected departure is especially significant. Even though he didn't solve the point guard problem, his athleticism enabled him to play both big guard and small forward. And, of course, Hamilton and power forward Andy Markowski must be replaced, along with Troy Piatkowski, who decided not to pursue an additional season of eligibility, under the same rules as Larry Florence.

Nee has recruited inside players: Steffon Bradford, Kimani Ffriend, George Mazcyk, Kenny Booker and Brian Conklin. The slender Conklin figures to be redshirted. But the others will play.

Although Bradford is the shortest of the group at 6-foot-6, he will provide rebounding muscle and should be in the starting lineup early, if not right away. The same is true of Ffriend, whom Nee visited at his home in Jamaica as the April letter-of-intent signing period approached, just to be sure.

Without a point guard who can score as well as distribute and defend, however, the Cornhuskers are likely to have problems against next season. The committee concept didn't work all that well.

That's why there was concern Danny Walker, who made an oral commitment to Nebraska in mid-January, might be persuaded to change his mind at the last minute and sign with Texas or UNLV, to which he made a recruiting visit in April before finally signing.

The 6-1 Walker, Bradford's teammate at Compton, Calif., Community College is a key figure in a recruiting class that could prove to be among Nee's best in 13 years at Nebraska.

It doesn't take much to envision Walker as an immediate starter, in a lineup that could include Belcher and Larry Florence, providing he completes the necessary coursework during the summer, along with Bradford and Ffriend, with Cochran and Louis Truscott coming off the bench.

The immediate future looks bright, despite the loss of the Big 12 "Player of the Year." Replacing Hamilton won't be any easier than replacing Lue. But there is at least one difference. Center can be played by "committee" easier than point guard can, if it comes to that.

Ideally it won't, so Nee won't have to come up with any more catchy descriptions. ■



Cookie Belcher took a turn at point guard.

Try To Be Patient Waiting For Sept. 4

*There has to be some type of fix
for fans to fill their off-season void*



**Bill
DOLEMAN**

AH, SPRING HAS SPRUNG. There are leaves on the trees and flowers in bloom. Houses are cleaner, parks are played in, and the snow has melted, revealing the lush green carpet of Tom Osborne Field. It is a most wonderful time of the year.

Now, if it would only hurry up and get over with. After all, spring football practice is history and the Red-White game, which, of course, Nebraska won, is in the books.

The players have taken their tests, which tell us that the '99 Huskers will be bigger, stronger, faster, leaner and meaner (in a gridiron sense) than ever. As a result, the expectations are high, and the goals are many. We just need the earth to rotate and tilt its way to chillier temperatures, so that we could get the season underway.

Just keep telling yourself that it won't be long now. After the spring game, there were 140 shopping days until the 1999 season-opener. But who's counting? Unfortunately, that's two weeks more than last year, when the Red-White game was played on the traditional fourth Saturday in April, and the Huskers opened Aug. 29 against Louisiana Tech in the Eddie Robinson Classic.

Well, this year, because of some cruel twist in the university's schedule, the spring game was held a week earlier than usual. Meanwhile, the season doesn't get underway until Sept. 4. So what are football fans supposed to do until then?

To pass the time, the players will have a couple of months of workouts and passing leagues, sandwiched around jobs and internships. The coaches will be scouting opponents, vacationing with family and camping at Memorial Stadium with hundreds of prospects.

Sure, over the course of four and a half months, we could try to correct our slice, build a deck, backpack through Europe, save the whales, read or write the Great American Novel, anything to pass the time. But there has to be some type of off-season fix for fans to fill their football void until we all knock on Iowa's door to see if the Hawkeyes want to come out and play.

The best way is to talk it out. We must communicate our feelings. Misery loves company, and for football fans this has to be the most miserable time of the year. Unless, of course, your team hasn't had a winning season since the last millenium. Then the fall isn't much fun. But when your team has won at least nine games a year for the past three-plus decades and has captured three national titles in the '90s alone, well, then these are tough times.

The season-opener is still months away. There are no practice reports on the evening news and no signing day on

the horizon. There are thousands of football fans out there with questions and opinions who are searching for answers, reassurance and a shoulder pad to lean on. In the land of the Big Red, the Husker-huddled masses have each other, and as we head into the great divide between spring football and fall camp, here's my coffee-shop commentary for the season ahead.

Looking back, I think the 9-4 campaign Nebraska put together in 1998 was perfect. Certainly not perfect in the sense of the '95 Huskers, who, for my money, represent college football's greatest team. But perfect in the sense that it provides foundation, direction and commitment for 1999.

While 99 percent of the country would love to win nine games in a season, the Huskers have said they're embarrassed by the four losses and that they need to get the program back to where it used to be. I don't think there's any need to be embarrassed by it, but who am I to stand in the way of motivation? And if other teams (south of the Big Red border, for example) want to think that they've caught up with Nebraska, who am I to stand in the way of their folly?

As a football fan, I thought 1998 was one of the most exciting seasons in memory and that this year's team will be better for it. Look at the number of close games last year's squad played in. Those experiences are invaluable, especially if your name is Eric Crouch, Dominic Raiola, Kyle Vanden Bosch, Keyuo Craver or Loran Kaiser.

While Nebraska's practices are well-known for their high number of repetitions and simulated crowd noise, nothing can prepare someone for battle better than the experience of having been in one.

I'm reminded of the Huskers who left the Orange Bowl in January of 1994, dejected and distraught after a loss to Florida State. Nebraska led the game 16-15 with 1:16 remaining, and all summer long, that score was posted on the Memorial Stadium scoreboard. A year after losing to the Seminoles, they walked off the same field with the first of three national titles. Sometimes the going has to get tough before the tough get going.

Who knows what the scoreboard will read this summer. It may not matter. By all indications, through winter conditioning and spring practice, the Huskers haven't needed a compass to point them in the right direction. Meanwhile, those of us who love football just need a little patience and for the earth to orbit, rotate and tilt its way to the fall a little quicker so that we could get the season underway. ■

1999 Schedule

Sept. 4	@ Iowa
Sept. 11	California
Sept. 18	So. Mississippi
Sept. 25	@ Missouri
Oct. 2	Oklahoma State
Oct. 9	Iowa State
Oct. 23	@ Texas
Oct. 30	@ Kansas
Nov. 6	Texas A&M
Nov. 13	Kansas State
Nov. 26	@ Colorado

Bill Doleman's face is familiar to Cornhusker fans. He is host for several Nebraska-related television programs including the "Husker Show" and coaches' shows for Terry Pettit, Paul Sanderford and Frank Solich.

Baseball Team Plays To Standing-Room-Only Crowd

*Surprising Huskers earn respect
by sweeping highly regarded Longhorns*



**Curt
McKEEVER**

SOME FANS who wanted to see the Nebraska-Texas baseball game on March 28 had little choice but to hang out in the bullpen area at Buck Beltzer Stadium.

Normally, that's a forbidden zone, but since it was pretty much the last remaining open space, second-year Coach Dave Van Horn looked the other way when people came through the gate.

Hey, who's Van Horn to be turning down someone who wants to watch while he resurrects a program that not much more than a year ago appeared in shambles and reeling from the ugly firing of 20-year Coach John Sanders.

How quickly time passes.

With an all-time Beltzer crowd of 3,387 on hand, Nebraska completed a three-game sweep of the ninth-ranked Longhorns to strengthen its grip on first place in the Big 12 Conference.

That's right, first place.

"They are a very impressive college baseball team," said Texas Coach Augie Garrido, who, judging by the three national championships his Cal State-Fullerton teams won, knows a little about the game. "They're well-schooled and well-coached. They're very disciplined and committed to the team effort."

Garrido wasn't the only one noticing.

After the weekend sweep, the Huskers moved into all three of the major national polls. Baseball America had them No. 18. In Collegiate Baseball, they were No. 19 and in Baseball Weekly No. 22.

That new stadium people keep alluding to would probably come in handy right now. The good news is that while Nebraska, and its fans, are stuck at The Buck for a couple more seasons, nothing else about the program is in neutral.

What Van Horn has put together overnight is downright amazing. Already, the 38-year-old is on the brink of being labeled a miracle worker.

"It's been real exciting for our players and our coaches to see our team progress so quickly with all these new players and coaches, and maybe a different approach," Van Horn said. "When we signed those nine kids this past fall, we asked them to trust us that we were going to have a good team and a good program. We got some good players to commit to us, and I know it's probably real exciting for them, too, to see we're doing so well so early."

While there were signs the 1999 Huskers were going to be competitive, they hit the front pages across the nation on

March 16, when they scored an NCAA record 50 runs in a 50-3 win against Chicago State.

Nebraska then swept three games at Kansas to move to 5-1 in the Big 12 and roll into the series against Texas.

After winning the opener 11-4, the Huskers overcame two four-run deficits the next day to post a 9-8 win.

"This team works hard," Van Horn said. "I think it comes from maybe the whole coaching staff putting an emphasis on how important practice is and what it takes to win, and concentration and dedication and a lot of that stuff that you always hear. But it really is true, especially when you're dealing with kids that are 18 to 22 years old that have a lot of things they could be doing."

As of April, Van Horn had a team that's "zoned in."

Offensively, all but one player on the roster was hitting above .300. The Huskers' team batting average was .371, or 36 points higher than the No. 2 team in the Big 12.

On the mound, freshman Shane Komine was 5-0 but still

not considered the ace of the staff. That's because Scott Fries, a junior who began his college career at tiny Peru State (Neb.) was 5-1 with a better earned-run average. Fries' only loss came to then second-ranked Rice, but he still went the distance in that one.

Fries got his fifth win against Texas, col-laring the Longhorns with a five-hitter.

"You know they have to be wondering what's going on," he said after that win.

The Huskers execute routine plays, hit with two strikes and study their opponents intently to gain any advantage possible.

Those are signs of Van Horn's attention to detail and organization.

Van Horn humbly shuns the attention and will tell you he's just delegating duties that are being carried out to his liking.

He'll also remind you that first baseman Ken Harvey (a front-runner for Big 12 Player of the Year), catcher Brian Johnson, designated hitter Jeff Hedman and third baseman Danny Kimura were recruited before his arrival.

But there's no mistaking that under his leadership, Nebraska baseball has taken off in a new direction.

"I don't think anybody probably expects us to win the Big 12," Van Horn said. "But I can tell you one thing — they're saying you'd better score some runs against Nebraska or they're going to beat you. You'd better play good against Nebraska or they're going to beat you. You'd better not look past them or they're going to beat you."

"What's that mean? That means we're getting some respect, and that's all you want." ■

Half 100 vs. Chicago St.					
Name (Pos.)	AB	R	H	B	I
Adam Shabala cf	1	3	1	1	
Scott Larsen rf	4	3	3	4	
Brandt Vlieger ss	2	2	2	4	
Will Bolt ss	4	1	2	3	
Justin Cowan c	5	3	3	4	
Brian Kent c	2	1	1	1	
Jeff Hedman lf	3	2	2	3	
Erik Mumm lf	3	4	3	0	
Ken Harvey dh	6	7	3	5	
Jim Bailey 3b	2	7	2	3	
Craig Moore 1b	7	6	5	10	
Adam Stern rf/cf	7	5	4	6	
John Cole 2b	5	6	4	4	
Jay Sirianni p	0	0	0	0	
Chad Wiles p	0	0	0	0	
R.D. Spiels p	0	0	0	0	
Brandon Penas p	0	0	0	0	
Totals	51	50	35	48	
Score by Innings					
Chicago St.	000	201	0-3	3	5
Nebraska	9(10)	4	9(13)	5	1

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

DEFENSE

Dominates

Two long fumble returns for touchdowns and a 100-yard kickoff return add spice to Spring Game

Story by Mike Babcock
Photos by Scott Bruhn

Keyuo Craver was asked to assess the Nebraska football team's defense following the Red-White intrasquad game. The freshman cornerback smiled. "We're real good," he said.

Considering how the defense dominated during the spring, few would dispute that.

In two major scrimmages and the Red-White game combined, the offense rushed for 2.9 yards per carry, completed only 43.5 percent of its passes and scored six touchdowns.

The first-team, Red offense scored just two of those six touchdowns, including the last in the Red-White game on a 14-play, 87-yard drive kept alive by a 45-yard pass from Eric Crouch to Matt Davison on third-and-22 from the White team's 47 and capped by Correll Buckhalter's 1-yard dive.

"If we hadn't scored on the final

drive, I would have been really disappointed because you can't leave all the scoring up to the defense and special teams," said Buckhalter, a junior-to-be.

That's what happened, however, in the Red team's 27-12 victory before nearly 30,000 at Memorial Stadium. White team I-back Chris Butler, a walkon from Hoover, Ala., opened the game's scoring with a 47-yard touchdown run midway through the first quarter, and Josh Brown added a 34-yard field goal early in the second. But then the defense and special teams took over the point producing.

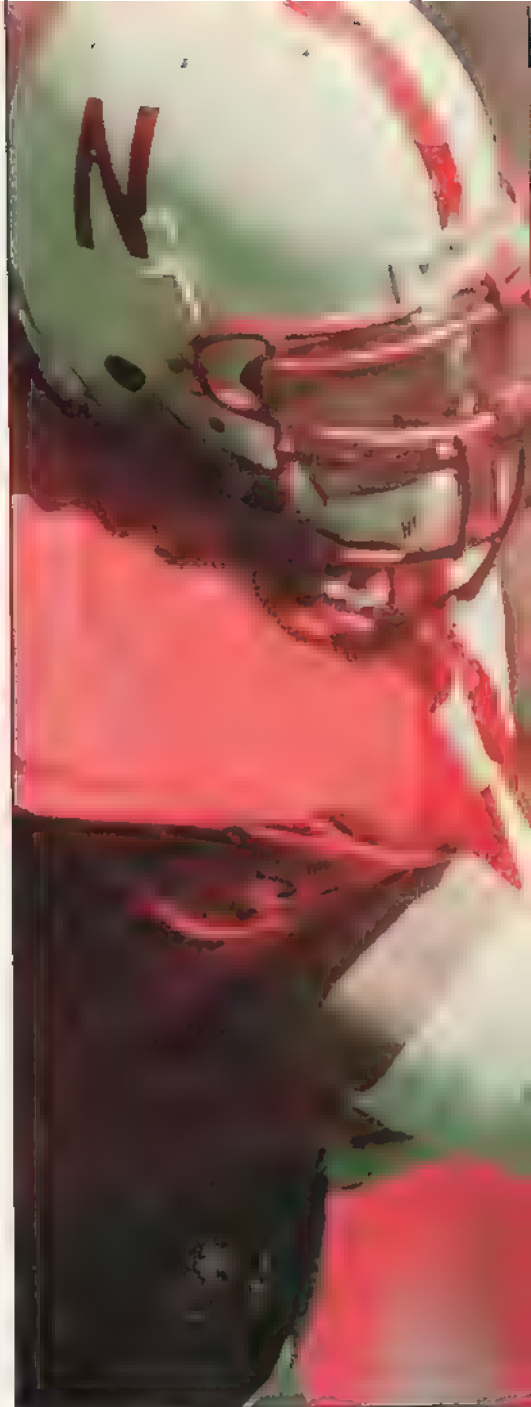
Freshman defensive back Michael Demps fielded the ensuing kickoff 7 or 8 yards deep in his own end zone and, to the surprise of nearly everyone, returned it 100 yards for a touchdown.

"I just saw the good wedge in front of me," Demps explained. "If

someone would have penetrated the wedge, I would have downed it. It was another prayer the Lord answered for me."

About 10 minutes later, a center snap sailed over the head of punter Dan Hadenfeldt, who chased the ball down in his own end zone and attempted to kick it. But rover Mike Brown blocked the ball out of the back of the end zone for a safety, which gave the White team a 12-7 halftime lead.

The defense gave the Red team the lead, and all the points it needed for the victory, with a pair of touchdowns, the first coming near the end of the third quarter when free safety Greg McGraw gathered up a fumble





Quarterback Jay Runty is stopped for a loss by nose tackle Jason Lohr (left) in the second quarter. The drive ended with a 34-yard field goal by Josh Brown.

by I-back Dahrran Diedrick and returned it 94 yards for the score.

About five minutes later, rush end Jeremy Lyman intercepted a Jay Runty pitchout intended for I-back Tyler Rauenzahn and ran 23 yards to score. "Hopefully, you won't see that type of play in the fall from us," said Coach Frank Solich, who watched from a new skybox high atop the west stadium.

"We certainly hadn't planned the type of special plays that happened today."

Without those special scoring plays, the game might have ranked

with the least offensive since Bob Devaney established the intrasquad format in his first season as coach in 1962.

The 1969 game ended 10-8 in favor of the White team.

Despite the offensive problems, Solich didn't seem overly concerned. "Nothing jumped out at me as far as what we got accomplished or didn't get accomplished," he said afterward.

"It was about what I expected. We had a ton of players who were being interwoven with the different units, jumping back and forth. And

that generally doesn't lead to great execution."

Offensive stability was a problem throughout the spring because of the absence of several players, among them quarterback Bobby Newcombe, I-backs DeAngelo Evans and Dan Alexander and tackle Adam Julch. Except for Julch, who joined the final workout before the Red-White game, the first-team offensive line was intact. But the backfield was a mixture of experience and inexperience.

And "when you have a mixture like that, you do have breakdowns,"



Unlike last year, when Bobby Newcombe won the quarterback job with his Spring Game performance, this year's competition will have to wait until the fall. Eric Crouch (left) played in a green vest to avoid injury, while Newcombe (right) watched intently from the sideline. Newcombe was one of 23 Huskers held out because of injuries.



said Solich.

In addition, Crouch was limited by a green pullover jersey, which he wore throughout the spring and during the Red-White game as a reminder to defensive players to hold up in tackling him.

With Newcombe recovering from knee surgery, Solich wanted to keep Crouch healthy. "But that makes it very difficult for a player, and really for a unit, to execute an offense when you have a quarterback not being tackled," he said. "It really cuts down on the number of options that you run."

Crouch had a rushing net of minus-14 yards and completed only 4-of-13 passes for 63 yards, with two interceptions. The performance was "OK, probably nothing special," Solich said.

Buckhalter was the leading rusher, with 90 yards and the final touchdown on 14 carries.

Despite the unimpressive statistics, Mike Brown came away from the spring impressed by the progress of the offense. "You've got to understand, offense takes time," the senior-to-be said.

"Defense, you can pretty much just throw guys out there. Offense, it takes longer. Going against them in practice, they're a great offense. You can't say anything bad about them."

You can't say anything bad about the defense, either, although the occasional lapses in offensive execution might have made assessing the defense difficult, according to Solich.

"I think that's fair to say because maybe at times we slowed ourselves

down offensively," he said. "It's really tough to tell where we're at defensively. The only thing I'm going on is that it (the defense) is a very physical group. It's an experienced group. And I think it's capable of playing great football."

"We expect that to be the case in the fall. But right now it still remains to be seen."

Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride was less uncertain. "We've got a pretty good bunch of guys who know what they're doing," he said. "You put that first bunch out there, and they're not neophytes. You know what I'm saying? The whole defense is a bunch of hard-nosed guys."

The defense dominated despite the fact "we limited the amount of blitzing we would do, and certainly the amount of stunting we would do," said Solich. "The defense was pretty basic."

Pretty basic? Try a lot basic. "We haven't put in our whole defense, so we kept a lot of our pressure-package stuff out," McBride said. "We felt like we wanted to see the kids play the raw game of football in our basic defenses. I mean, those are the defenses that should win for you anyway."

"That's what you hang your hat on. Everything else we do is a variation off those defenses."

The defense was playing without Eric Johnson and Julius Jackson, the top two weakside linebackers, and Tony Ortiz, who alternates with Brian Shaw at strongside linebacker.

In addition, McBride pulled Mike

Brown, cornerback Ralph Brown and middle linebacker Carlos Polk in the second half, figuring they had played enough snaps. Even without them, the defense nearly prevented the final touchdown. When the No. 1 offense returned, McBride sent most of the No. 1 defense back onto the field as well. "I told those kids I didn't want to see them in the end zone," he said.

"They let them in. But that was a great catch (by Davison)."

As for stopping Buckhalter, who scored on his second carry, "we didn't have any goal line package," said McBride. "We played our short-yardage package there, field short-yardage package."

Among the other positives of the Red-White game, and the spring in general, was that the team came through without many new injuries. Offensive tackle Nate Kolterman suffered what appeared to be the most significant injury, an ACL tear during the Red-White game.



Quarterback Jeff Perino also left the game with what Solich described as a "low-grade" shoulder separation, which wasn't expected to hamper him for more than a couple of weeks.

The team got some good news a couple of days before the spring game when the NCAA reversed an initial decision and granted wingback Shevin Wiggins an additional season of eligibility. The ruling came much too late for Wiggins to participate in the Red-White game, however.

No doubt, Wiggins would have helped the No. 1 offense had he been in the mix. But Solich was pleased it could score without him and the others. "It's good to see them put together a drive against the top unit (defense) because I think we're going to be excellent from a defensive standpoint," he said.

Craver was among those who readily agreed. ■

4TH & 1NCHES

More News From Spring Football

INJURIES, INJURIES, INJURIES

Nebraska was beset by injuries last season, and much to the chagrin of Coach Frank Solich, they carried over in the spring. Quarterback Bobby Newcombe, I-back Dan Alexander, offensive tackle Adam Julch (who actually worked out the last day) and weakside linebacker Eric Johnson were among those sidelined all spring by injuries.

I-back DeAngelo Evans and fullback Willie Miller were among those who were able to return, in Evans' case in a limited way, before spring practice was finished.

The rash of injuries to key players mystified Solich. "I've talked to the trainers. I've talked to the doctors. And their feeling is that it's really unusual," he said. "They can't put a finger on it. So I guess as we look at it, there's probably not much that we would have done differently."

Here, in no particular order, are some injury issues from the spring.

■ Freshman I-back DeAntae Grixby suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee during a non-contact drill early in the spring and underwent arthroscopic surgery soon after.

With Alexander and Evans sidelined by injuries, Grixby and the other young I-backs had an opportunity to gain valuable experience during the spring, and Grixby appeared ready to take advantage of it. Following the limited scrimmage on the first Saturday, defensive coordinator Charlie McBride told the Lincoln Journal Star: "I've got one name that sticks out in my mind — Grixby."

"I'd like to think at some point in time in the fall he'll be able to come out," Solich said. "He's a tough guy. He's had an injury before. He knows what it takes."

■ Evans, who underwent arthroscopic knee surgery following the Holiday Bowl, returned to practice on the third Friday of the spring, though he was held out of contact. Evans' return was "real important, not only for us timing wise, to have him running with the 1s, but I think just for himself, feeling good about where he's at and confident . . . that he is healthy and ready to go," said Solich.

■ Miller missed the first two weeks of the spring following abdominal surgery. The junior from Omaha was understandably rusty when he returned. Even so, "I think he's showed signs of really being what we look for at the fullback spot," said Solich. "He's a little bigger. I think he's certainly much more confident in himself at this point in time in his career. And I think that will show in the season."

■ Senior wingback Frankie London, who suffered a broken leg last season, underwent additional surgery late in the spring. The surgery was expected to sideline him another month.

■ Senior weakside linebacker Julius Jackson also underwent arthroscopic surgery to repair a cartilage tear in his right knee, after testing the knee during an early practice. "I probably shouldn't have pushed it, and I probably shouldn't have been out there," he said. The injury occurred during winter conditioning.

■ Senior strongside linebacker Tony Ortiz suffered a severe knee sprain and missed the last two weeks of the spring, leaving senior Brian Shaw to take the majority of snaps with the top unit.

SPRING NOTABLES

■ Teams now are limited to only three full scrimmages during spring practice under NCAA rules. And that includes the Red-White game. As a result, the Cornhuskers participated in a limited scrimmage, after completing group work, on the first of four Saturdays this spring.

The defense dominated both scrimmages leading up to the Red-White game, recording 14 sacks in the first and nine in the second. The first scrimmage produced four touchdowns, all on plays of 35 yards or longer, and three field goals. The second produced only one touchdown and two field goals.

The touchdowns in the major scrimmages were scored by fullback Paul Kasti (71-yard run), quarterback Jeff Perino (65-yard run), weakside linebacker Gabe Fries (48-yard interception return), quarterback Eric Crouch (35-yard run) and I-back James Kelly (15-yard run).

Josh Brown kicked field goals of 40, 23 and 21 yards, Dan Hadenfeldt from 23 and 21 yards. Each time the offense was in position, two field goals were attempted by different kickers.

■ Defensive backs coach George Darlington dismissed pre-spring internet rumors regarding position switches for Erwin Swiney and Clint Finley as "ludicrous." According to the rumors, Swiney would be moved from cornerback to safety and Finley would be moved from safety to outside linebacker. Freshman Michael Demps, who began the spring as a cornerback, did get a look at strong safety and nickel back, however.

■ Another spring rumor was that Jason Thomas, a highly regarded quarterback recruited by the Cornhuskers out of high school, might be transferring to Nebraska after being given a release from his scholarship by Southern California. "Just because he went somewhere else doesn't mean we lost interest if he's available," defensive backs coach George Darlington told the Lincoln Journal Star. ■

Stella: Making up for lost time

Franks Solich's assessment of Randy Stella's first scrimmage was unsolicited.

Stella "was out, moving around very, very well," Solich said following practice on the next-to-last Monday of the spring. "You know, I don't want to point out any one guy, but it's been a while since Randy's been able to really do things on the football field the way he's capable of because of injuries."

"So that was very promising for Randy, I'm sure."

It also was very promising for the Cornhuskers, who are counting on Stella, if not this season, certainly next. "He's a guy who has a future here," said defensive coordinator Charlie McBride.

That Solich and McBride would be so impressed by Stella is no surprise. He was a prize scholarship recruit from Omaha Benson who apparently had the ability to play as a true freshman if not for his falling just short of NCAA initial eligibility standards now under scrutiny by the federal courts.

As a result, Stella was classified as a partial qualifier; he could practice but not play in games last fall, a situation that became somewhat moot after he underwent knee surgery.

"Wooo, it was tough," he said. "I had to do it my sophomore year in high school when I broke my ankle, and I knew what it was like, what I had to go through. But it was real bad because I really wanted to get out there and show them (the coaches) what I had. At least I wasn't playing, so I could go ahead and just rest and get my knee well, (then) come out here for spring ball and do what I could do."

He's playing weakside linebacker but could also play on the strong-side, versatility that will serve him well. The Cornhuskers are experienced at linebacker. But the top four on the outside all are seniors: Tony Ortiz and Brian Shaw on the strong-side, Eric Johnson and Julius



Weakside linebacker Randy Stella made an impression on Nebraska coaches in the spring.

Jackson on the weakside.

Nebraska will have to fill a significant void at linebacker for the 2000 season, and Solich is already looking ahead. Identifying young linebackers is "vitally important," he said.

"You don't have to finish the question. That, without question, is an objective, to get some guys ready to go in a year's time because we basically lose about three-deep across the board there, at the linebacker spots — or, at least, we have quality players we're going to lose at all three positions."

"You don't want to get caught in a situation in a year's time where you just don't have anybody really confident and ready to go. So we're going to have to try to get some of those inexperienced guys some plays so that they feel pretty good about themselves going into the following season."

The 6-foot, 205-pound Stella is prominent among them because of his speed and athletic ability. He was a two-time high school state champion in the long jump and finished fourth in the 100 meters at the state track and field meet as a senior, running the distance in 11.06 seconds.

Despite being hampered by an ankle sprain and turf toe his senior football season, he was credited with 120 tackles, including 62 unassisted, and he rushed for 761 yards and 11 touchdowns.

He was recruited as a line-backer, but he wouldn't be averse to playing I-back.

"I'm going to stay at line-backer. But if they ever needed me to go to running back, I would be more than happy to," he said. "I'm not going to say anything unless they really need it, though."

Making up for lost time at linebacker was burden enough in the spring. Stella was so eager "I think I tried to jump off too fast and do too much the first time I got back on the field," he said.

"I kind of overwhelmed myself, not getting in position, not really thinking, just running around. But when I calmed down after a couple of practices, I pretty much realized how much more focused I have to be on the field, not really using all talent but some of the mental part of the game, too."

His learning was facilitated by watching videotape of practices and "listening to the coaches screaming at me, telling me to get in the spot, drop back, step up in the hole," he said with a smile.

On balance, he wasn't as mistake-prone as might be expected considering his delayed start. "I made my little misses," Stella said, adding: "I'm not going to brag . . . but not too many."

"I don't think I was too far behind. I was still going to meetings and getting some of the plays down. But jumping back into action when I came off (the injury), I was still kind of wobbly."

He also was tentative because of the knee injury. "I was kind of favoring it maybe, thinking: 'I don't really want contact because if I step wrong like I did last time, I've blown it,'" he said. After "a couple of practices, I said to myself, sometimes you've just got to go ahead and let it go."

Soon after he quit thinking about the knee, he suffered a 5-inch gash on the back of his right shoulder, which sent him from a scrimmage to the training room early and required 12 stitches.

He returned, stitched up, for the next practice, however. "I really didn't want to practice, but I'm trying not to be all sensitive all the time," Stella said midway through the spring. "I know what I can do and what I can't do, and I wanted to go out there and show them (the coaches), not just stand around."

"It's really good to be out there, so I'm going to try to be out there as much as I can."

With Johnson and Jackson sidelined by injuries, Stella played with the second-team defense, behind senior-to-be Josh Kohl, who moved up with the top unit. On occasion, Stella gave Kohl a rest, rotating in with the first team, an experience that made him "feel like I'm in the big leagues," he said.

"To tell you the truth, I really expected to be down with the 3s, playing with them. But the coaches came up to me and told me I had the ability and the talent to play where they needed me."

"Wherever they need me to play, that's where I'm going to play."

Stella was pleased that Solich had mentioned his name after watching videotape of the first scrimmage in which he participated. "That's the guy I wanted to impress the most, besides my position coach," said Stella. "He gave me a scholarship, so I'm going to give him all I have."

Solich, "the main man," and linebackers coach Craig Bohl aren't the only ones to whom Stella feels responsible, however. He also has a responsibility to his teammates, he said, "because when somebody goes down, you've got to have a person step up. So I'm going to do what I can, do it for my family and friends back home . . . and I'm still trying to represent my high school."

He takes pride in wearing a No. 34 jersey, as he did at Benson High.

"I'm feeling pretty good, confident about myself now," he said.

That was Solich's goal for him this spring. ■

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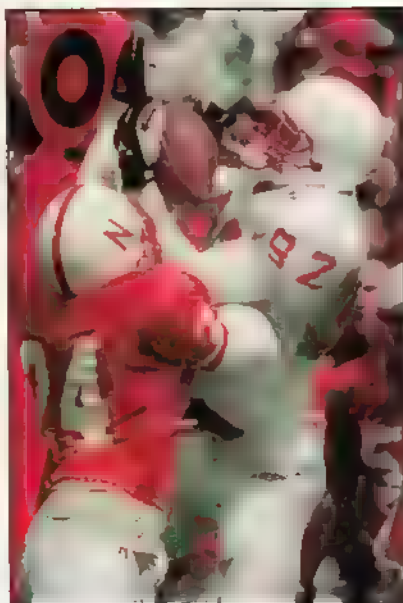
Red vs. White
Spring Game • April 17, 1999 • Lincoln, Neb.

Score By Quarters

White	7	5	0	0	—	12
Red	0	7	7	13	—	27

Team Stats

	W	R
First Downs	14	8
Rushing	6	6
Passing	8	2
Penalty	0	0
Rushing Attempts	57	36
Yards Gained Rushing	162	137
Yards Lost Rushing	93	22
Net Yards Rushing	69	115
Net Yards Passing	147	63
Passes Attempted	15	13
Passes Completed	10	4
Had Intercepted	0	2
Total Plays	72	49
Total Net Yards	216	178
Avg. Gain Per Play	3.0	3.6
Fumbles-Lost	6-2	2-1
Penalties-Yards	3-15	6-30
Punts-Yards	9-419	6-211
Avg. Per Punt	46.6	35.2
Punt Returns-Yards	4-72	2-11
Interceptions-Yards	2-9	0-0
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	2-117
Kickoff Returns-Yards	5-106	3-123
Possession Time	35:36	23:24



Scoring

White — Chris Butler 47-yard run (Josh Brown kick)

White — J. Brown, 34-yard field goal

Red — Mike Demps 100-yard kickoff return (Dan Hadenfeldt kick)

White — Mike Brown blocked punt for safety

Red — Greg McGraw 94-yard fumble return (J. Brown kick)

Red — Jeremy Lyman 23-yard fumble return (J. Brown kick)

Red — Correll Buckhalter 1-yard run (kick failed)

Injured

Did Not Play	
Dan Alexander	IB
Sasho Becvaroski	TE
Joe Chrisman	QB
Ben Combs	WB
Billy Diekmann	OT
DeAngelo Evans	IB
Patrick Friesen	SE
DeAntae Grixby	IB
Julius Jackson	WLB
Eric Johnson	WLB
Adam Julch	OT
Frankie London	WB
Jake McKee	TE
Jeff Nelson	DT
Bobby Newcombe	QB
Tony Ortiz	SLB
Brandon Quindt	ROV
Steve Raymond	SLB
Chris Saalfeld	OG
Jeremy Stanislav	FB
Jim Tansey	OT
Alik Tillery	IB
Joe Walker	FS/R

Individual Leaders

White

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Butler, C.	8	57	7.1	47	1
Albertson, M.	5	11	2.2	5	0
Kingson, B.	2	9	4.5	5	0
Diedrick, D.	5	8	1.6	5	0
Uhler, T.	1	5	5.0	5	0
Klein, J.	1	3	3.0	3	0
Rauenzahn, T.	8	3	0.4	4	0
Piening, H.	1	-2	2.0	0	0
Hughes, C.	1	-4	-4.0	0	0
Runty, J.	18	-5	-0.3	9	0
McClary, D.	1	-8	-8.0	0	0
Perino, J.	6	-8	-1.3	11	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Runty, J.	9-13-0	69.2	136	0
Perino, J.	1-2-0	50.0	11	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Bowling, J.	3	57	19.0	24	0
Fischer, C.	2	17	8.5	11	0
Gutz, Seth	1	23	23.0	23	0
Albertson, M.	1	20	20.0	20	0
Kosch, P.	1	19	19.0	19	0
Bender, J.	1	8	8.0	8	0
Aguglia, S.	1	5	5.0	5	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Brown, J.	4	200	50.0	69
Rothers, T.J.	2	89	44.5	48
Hadenfeldt, D.	3	130	43.3	61

FIELD GOALS

Name	Att.	Good	LNG
Brown, J.	2	1	34
Hadenfeldt, D.	1	0	0

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Craver, K.	2	37	18.5	26	0
Brown, M.	1	38	38.0	38	0
Groce, D.	1	3	3.0	0	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Butler, C.	1	19	19.0	19	0
Craver, K.	3	67	22.3	38	0
Groce, D.	1	20	20.0	20	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Show, B.	1	4	5	0	0	0
Wills, A.	2	2	4	15	0	1-5
Pick, C.	2	2	4	1-5	0	0
Kohl, J.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Brown, M.	3	1	4	0	0	0
Nelson, C.	1	2	3	11	0	1-1
Stella, R.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Wichmann, J.P.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Kaiser, R.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Warren, S.	2	0	2	1-4	0	0
Vanden Bosch	2	0	2	1-7	0	1-7
Buettnerback, B.	1	1	2	1-1	0	0
Hank, B.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Gustafson, C.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Neal, D.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Groce, D.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Swiney, E.	1	0	1	0	1-9	0
Gummert, M.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Almanza, L.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Kelsay, C.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Tata, T.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Westenburg, B.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Veland, T.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Fischer, E.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Finley, C.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Woodward, W.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Wills, C.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Lechtenburg, A.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Booker, D.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Craver, K.	0	0	0	0	1-0	0

Red

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Buckhalter, C.	14	90	6.4	26	1
Kastl, P.	4	17	4.3	7	0
Kelly, J.	5	14	2.8	7	0
Butler, C.	2	3	1.5	2	0
Miler, W.	2	3	1.5	2	0
Diedrick, D.	1	1	1.0	1	0
Gutz, Sam	2	1	0.5	2	0
Crouch, E.	6	-14	-2.3	3	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	4-13-2	30.8	63	0
Gutz, Sam	0-0-0	0.0	0	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Davison, M.	1	45	45.0	45	0
Wistrom, T.	1	17	17.0	17	0
Diedrick, D.	1	5	5.0	5	0
Buckhalter, C.	1	-4	-4.0	0	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	2	91	45.5	53
Brown, J.	3	120	40.0	52

FIELD GOALS

Name	Att.	Good	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	1	0	0

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Demps, M.	2	11	5.5	9	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Diedrick, D.	1	14	14.0	14	0
Demps, M.	1	100	100.0	100	1
Ryan, E.	1	9	9.0	9	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Smith, J.	4	4	8	3-14	0	2-12
Ryan, E.	1	5	6	1-3	0	0
Lohr, J.	4	2	6	3-7	0	0
Burrow, J.	2	4	6	2-5	0	0
Vedra, M.	1	5	6	0	0	0
Shanley, S.	1	3	4	2-18	0	2-18
Ringenburg, K.	1	3	4	2-9	0	1-8
Clanton, J.	2	2	4	0	0	0
Fries, G.	3	1	3	3-12	0	0
Booker, D.	3	1	4	1-4	0	0
McGinn, M.	1	2	3	0	0	0
Watchorn, T.	1	2	3	0	0	0
Coyne, J.	1	2	3	1-1	0	0
Slechte, J.	0	3	3	1-1	0	0
Buettnerback, B.	1	2	3	0	0	0
Adams, D.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Penny, J.	1	1	2	1-2	0	0
Boatner, M.	1	1	2	0	0	0
McGraw, G.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Smith, L.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Anderson, J.	1	1	2	0	0	0
List, G.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Hemys, J.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Terpening, A.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Gustafson, C.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Lyman, J.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Demps, M.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Wistrom, T.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Pippens, J.	0	1	1	0	0	0
Williams, D.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Ickes, M.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Warrior, A.	0	1	1	0	0	0

REGISTRY

2. *Trigonostema* *Trigonostema*

Fine Line

A last-second loss at Texas Tech defined Nebraska's season

The Nebraska men's basketball season came down to 7.9 seconds, time enough for Texas Tech's Rayford Young to drive the length of the court and lay in the winning basket.

In those 7.9 seconds, hopes of competing for a Big 12 title ended. And the chances of the Cornhuskers making a second consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament were diminished.

"I would define our season on those 7 (plus) seconds," Coach Danny Nee said. "You've got to win that game."

Instead, Nebraska lost 73-68 — Texas Tech made four free throws in the final 1.9 seconds — and went on to finish in a fifth-place tie with Oklahoma State in the Big 12, with a 10-6 record.

As a result, the Cornhuskers didn't get a first-round bye in the conference tournament, and after a 69-50 victory in a rematch against Texas Tech, lost to Kansas 77-53. The loss to the Jayhawks, whom Nebraska had defeated twice in the regular season, effectively dashed its NCAA hopes.

"It's a very, very fine line," Nee said, citing the 7.9 seconds as evidence.

"We win that game, that puts us at 11 (conference victories). That puts Kansas and Missouri below us (in the standings) because we break all of the tie-breakers with them. I think everything else falls into place and we have a good year. And we're back in the NCAA (tournament)."

Instead, Nebraska returned to the National Invitation Tournament, defeating UNLV at home in the first round 68-55, then losing at Texas Christian 101-89 to finish the season at 20-13.

Not advancing to the NCAA Tournament, which seemed almost certain after the Cornhuskers won nine of 10 games during a mid-January to mid-February stretch, was disappointing.

"But as I told the players, you don't always get what you want," Nee said.

At its best, Nebraska was an NCAA Tournament-quality team. However, "when we were not competitive, we were bad," said Nee. "When we were not playing well, we were bad. An example would be the second half of the Wisconsin game, the second half of the Kansas (tournament) game."

"When we played poorly, we played bad. And that all related to turnovers."

The 78-41 Wisconsin loss came in the Top of the World Classic at Fairbanks, Alaska. In the Kansas loss, the Cornhuskers were outscored 40-22 in the second half and committed 27 turnovers.

Nebraska finished its non-conference schedule a disappointing 8-5,



Venson Hamilton earned Big 12 Player of the Year honors.

then lost its first two conference games, at Missouri (80-57) and against eventual Big 12 champion Texas (89-76). "As I analyze it, I really think we went through a growth period through November and December," Nee said.

Then came the dramatic turn-



1988-99 At A Glance

(20-13 OVERALL, 10-6 BIG 12)

Was it a good year? Yes. But "they all blend together," Coach Danny Nee after his 13th season at Nebraska. "A good year is getting another year. A coach's dream is another season."

Returning

(next season's eligibility)

	G-GS	PPG	RPG
Cookie Belcher, 6-4, Sr., G	32-32	11.8	3.3
*Larry Florence, 6-5, Sr., F	33-27	10.3	4.1
Cary Cochran, 6-1, So., G	32-0	5.4	1.4
Louis Truscott, 6-7, So., F	32-0	3.3	2.8
#Rodney Fields, 6-2, Jr., G	—	—	—
(*must complete coursework)			
#(redshirted)			

Coming in

Kenny Booker, 6-9, Fr., F	Mt. Zion (N.C.)
Steffon Bradford, 6-6, Jr., F	Christian Academy Compton (Calif.)
Brian Conklin, 6-11, Fr., F	Community College Hubbard, Ohio
Kimani Ffriend, 6-11, Jr., F-C	Gulf Coast (Fla.)
George Mazcyk, 6-8, So., F	Community College Coffeyville (Kan.)
Danny Walker, 6-1, Jr., G	Community College Compton (Calif.)
	Community College

Departed

	G-GS	PPG	RPG
Venson Hamilton, 6-10, C	33-32	15.7	10.2
Andy Markowski, 6-8, F-C	33-33	6.4	5.6
Chad Johnson, 6-6, Jr., G-F	33-15	6.8	3.0
Troy Piatkowski, 6-5, G-F	33-1	4.7	1.6
Joe Holmes, 5-11, G	29-24	1.8	1.0
Todd Smith, 6-4, G	8-0	0.1	0.3

Team Statistics

	NU	Opp.
Field goal percentage	.453	.416
3-point percentage	.310	.340
Free throw percentage	.651	.642
Rebounds/game	35.4	34.5
Turnovers	597	606
Points/game	66.0	64.3

"We played at a very high level in January and February, against some very tough competition," said Nee. "There's no question about it."

Senior center Venson Hamilton also played at a very high level during that 10-game stretch, establishing himself as the leading candidate for Big 12 player-of-the-year honors, which he would receive from both the Associated Press and the conference coaches.

Hamilton, who established school records for season (335) and career (1,080) rebounds, career blocked shots (241) and games played (129), earned AP All-America honorable mention.

He was the USBWA District 7 "Player of the Year" and a first-team NABC all-district selection. And he was included on the Big 12 all-defensive and all-improved teams.

Hamilton was complemented by junior guard Cookie Belcher, who led the Big 12 and ranked fifth in the nation in steals (3.2 per game) and set school and conference records with 102.

Belcher was a third-team AP all-conference pick, a member of the Big 12 all-defensive team for the second year in a row and one of 15 on the College Hoops Insider all-defensive team.

He was tried at point guard, an experiment that didn't work. Going into the season, "I thought we could fix the point guard, but I really felt we were thin in the front line," Nee said.

"I really thought we were one big man away. If we had one more good, solid big man to go in the front line, I think we could have rested people, taken people out when they played poorly. We were one player away, maybe at two positions, both the point and the five (center), of giving us the depth."

Even without that depth, however, the Cornhuskers came close, 7.9 seconds close. ■

around, the nine-of-10 surge, which included victories against four ranked opponents. "I don't think there's any game we won (during the streak) that we won by luck," said Nee. "I think in those games we were a pretty dominating basketball team and executed

"I think we got some breaks. But we didn't win one on a . . . buzzer shot.

"If anything, I think we were a little

unlucky in a couple of games. Iowa State in the last minute or two, a couple of balls are up on the rim. They roll in, we win by four or five points."

Instead, the Cornhuskers lost 52-47 at Ames, their only loss in the 10-game run.

In addition to the two victories against Kansas (84-69 and 64-59), the streak included a 96-81 victory against No. 25-ranked Oklahoma at Norman.

Paul Sanderford would have liked a victory in the NCAA Tournament, but overall, the 1998-99 season was . . .

Not Bad

Mission accomplished. Sort of. Sure, Coach Paul Sanderford would have liked for his Nebraska women's basketball team to advance in the NCAA Tournament instead of losing to Kentucky in the first round, 98-92.

But the Huskers played about as well as they could play that night at UCLA's Pauley Pavilion. They made a good run at it, leading the sixth-seeded Wildcats into the closing minutes.

Kentucky's full-court pressure and second-half rebounding were simply too much.

Nebraska, which finished 21-12, did well just getting to the NCAA Tournament for the second time in as many seasons under Sanderford.

"For some reason, I feel like we maxed this team out," he said during a pre-tournament news conference. "I feel like we got everything out of this team."

"We haven't played the best we can play, but we've maxed out getting to the tournament. Really, as a coach, I feel like we milked everything out of this group we can right now."

In doing so, the Huskers were able to exceed early-season expectations.

"I don't know who expected us to get in the NCAA Tournament in November, December, January. I had my doubts," said Sanderford. "But I'm really proud of this basketball team."

"I'm happy for the University of Nebraska because I think the perception of us backing up, of taking a step

back this year, would have been horrible for our program."

The Huskers were 23-10 and defeated New Mexico in the first round of the 1998 NCAA Tournament before bowing out to perennial power Old Dominion in Sanderford's first season.

Their chances of returning to the tournament had diminished significantly after a slump in January and early February during which they lost eight-of-12 conference games. But they rallied to win four in a row, including two in the Big 12 Tournament, to earn an NCAA at-large bid.

"We won some tough games in the last two-and-a-half weeks," Sanderford said. "I'm really proud of the fact that we didn't die and go away, that we fought back. The kids kind of gutted it up and found a way to win."

A 60-55 victory against fourth-seeded Texas, against whom they had lost 80-75 earlier in the season, in the Big 12 Tournament quarterfinals "really solidified our chances," he said. "I felt like we had done all we could do." Nevertheless, on the day bids were announced, "I was a little nervous."

As guard Nicole Kubik went, so



Junior guard Nicole Kubik finished second in the Big 12 in scoring, averaging 19.8 points, and led the conference by averaging 5.6 assists and 4.1 steals per game.

went the Huskers.

"This basketball team has played almost a mirror image of her season," said Sanderford. "When she's played well, we've had a chance to win."

"When she hasn't played well, or



1988-99 At A Glance

(21-12 OVERALL, 8-8 BIG 12)

Coach Paul Sanderford was preparing his team to play Kentucky in the NCAA Tournament. Even though the Wildcats had his undivided attention, "I'm already excited about next year," he said. Here's why.

Returning

(next season's eligibility)

	G-GS	PPG	RPG
Nicole Kubik, 5-10, Sr., G	33-33	19.8	3.8
Brooke Schwartz, 5-9, Sr., G	33-33	13.2	5.9
Charlie Rogers, 6-2, Sr., F-C	33-26	7.4	4.5
Amanda Went, 5-9, Jr., G	33-0	5.7	1.9
Monique Whitfield, 6-1, Sr., F	32-8	5.6	3.4
Naciska Gilmore, 6-0, Sr., F	33-14	4.9	3.9
Jennifer Jaracz, 6-0, So., G	20-0	1.9	0.6
Candace Blackbird, 6-0, So., G-F	10-2	1.7	0.8
Jill Fosdick, 5-10, Jr., G	6-0	1.5	1.5
Karsen Muller, 5-6, So., G	5-0	0.4	0.0
*Casey Leonhardt, 6-5, Jr., C			
(*transfer, University of Illinois, redshirted)			

Coming in

Keasha Cannon, 5-10, Fr., G	Kansas City, Kan.
Steph Jones, 6-2, Sr., F-G	Omaha, Neb.
Isha Kelley, 5-9, Fr., G	Lincoln, Neb.
Shahidrah Roberts, 5-9, Fr., G	Overland Park, Kan.
Paige Sutton, 6-2, Fr., F	Las Vegas, Nev.
Margaret Richards, 5-9, G	Louisville, Ky.

Departed

	G-GS	PPG	RPG
Cori McDill, 6-1, Sr., F	33-31	5.7	4.0
Monet Williams, 5-7, Sr., G	33-14	4.9	3.2
Lisa Reitsma, 6-4, Sr., C	33-4	3.2	3.6
Kate Benson, 6-2, Sr., F	17-0	1.1	0.9
Renee Saunders, 5-11, Jr., G	did not play		

Team Statistics

	NU	Opp.
Field goal percentage	.433	.398
3-point percentage	.310	.333
Free throw percentage	.671	.656
Rebounds/game	39.2	39.4
Turnovers	626	758
Points/game	73.4	65.8

mention from the Associated Press. Yet, inexplicably, she was only a second-team all-conference selection. Go figure.

"There are a lot of good players in the league," said Sanderford. "But Nicole Kubik belonged on the first team all-conference team.

"She proved that the first two days of that (Big 12) tournament. In fact, all three days."

Kubik set seven tournament records, including points (74) and steals (11). But she wasn't included on the all-tournament first team, either.

"We didn't play in the finals," Sanderford said.

"I understand how that works. I do think what Nicole did prove to everybody in the league was that they made a mistake leaving her off the first-team all-conference team. She had a great year."

On balance, so did the team, though Sanderford has raised the level of expectations for the program and wasn't completely satisfied. The Huskers made back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances for the first time in school history, and they won 20 games for a second consecutive season.

They also won over more fans. Attendance at the Devaney Sports Center increased 44.8 percent from the previous season's school record. Average attendance for home games was 5,000.

The NCAA Tournament was Sanderford's 14th in 17 seasons as a head coach. But "I'm not sure this one hasn't been

more satisfying than any of the others, except maybe the first one, just because we've had our backs against the wall," he said before leaving for Los Angeles.

This season will impact the future.

"For us to build a Top 20 program, a perennial Top 20 program, I think this trip is probably the most important to me that I've made out of 14," he said. ■

when she's struggled, we've struggled."

The junior from Cambridge, Neb., "did not play well in late January or early February," Sanderford said. And that coincided with the team's slide from a Top 20 ranking following a 13-2 start.

Kubik's not playing well was a relative description, however, based on her attempts to carry the team, which,

in turn, caused her to wear down physically, according to Sanderford.

Kubik finished second in the Big 12 in scoring, averaging 19.8 points, and led the conference by averaging 5.6 assists and 4.1 steals per game. Her 654 points, including a game-high 32 against Kentucky, were the fourth-most in the program's history, and her 136 steals were the most.

She earned All-America honorable

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Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

GUARD FINALLY PICKS NEBRASKA; CHAD JOHNSON LEAVING

After a brief delay, leading to concern that he might go elsewhere, Danny Walker, a point guard from Compton, Calif., Community College, signed a letter of intent with Nebraska, filling out what would appear to be one of the best recruiting classes in Danny Nee's tenure as coach.

The excitement that followed was diminished some by sophomore Chad Johnson's decision to transfer to a school closer to home. Johnson, who played an important role off the bench and then became the Cornhuskers' point guard down the stretch, figured prominently in next season's plans.

Joe Holmes, who spent most of the season as the starting point guard, and Todd Smith also won't return. Holmes is being placed on medical exempt status, which means he will retain his scholarship, because of a serious back problem, and Smith is transferring to a Florida junior college.

In addition, associate head coach Jimmy Williams apparently is headed elsewhere. Williams, who has been at Nebraska for seven years, told the Lincoln Journal Star he was "determined to leave."

With the two departures and medical exempt status for Holmes the Cornhuskers will be two under the NCAA scholarship maximum of 13, and only four will carry over from last season: Cookie Belcher, Larry Florence, who has petitioned for another season of eligibility, Cary Cochran and Louis Truscott.

Rodney Fields, a junior college transfer, was redshirted last season.

JUST TWO ROAD GAMES ON NON-CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

The Cornhuskers' non-conference schedule for the 1999-2000 season includes only two road games, against Creighton and Minnesota, and a tournament at St. Charles, Mo.

The tournament field includes Evansville, Northwestern, Radford, Southeast Missouri State, Southern Mississippi, Valparaiso and West Virginia.

Nebraska will have non-conference home games against Eastern Illinois, Pittsburgh, Oral Roberts, San Francisco, Missouri-Kansas City and Pacific in addition to playing host to the Ameritas Classic. Other teams in the Ameritas Classic are Columbia, Monmouth and Western Carolina.

COCHRAN TIES SCHOOL RECORD

Freshman guard Cary Cochran tied a school single-game record by making seven 3-point shots in the season-ending 101-89 loss at Texas Christian in the second round of the NIT. Cochran was 7-of-10 from 3-point range and finished with a career- and team-high 23 points.



Cary Cochran hit seven 3-point shots in Nebraska's second-round NIT game.

CLEVELAND ON RECOVERY TRAIL

Amanda Cleveland, who has been sidelined by a rare blood disorder called aplastic anemia since December of 1997, has improved dramatically, according to the Lincoln Journal Star.

The 6-foot-2 Cleveland, a Nike high school All-American from Lancaster, Texas, told the newspaper: "I'm just taking it day by day. I'm still not ready, and I shouldn't push it."

She was given medical clearance for limited physical testing in the off-season.

If she were able to return to the team next season, she would be a sophomore in eligibility.

BIG 12 SECOND-TOUGHEST

In evaluating Nebraska's 8-8 conference record, consider that the Big 12 was rated the nation's second-toughest conference, behind the Southeastern Conference, which advanced eight teams into the NCAA Tournament. Nebraska was among five Big 12 teams in the NCAA Tournament.

The others were Texas Tech, Iowa State, Kansas and Texas. Iowa State, which the Huskers defeated 68-67 at the Devaney Sports Center, upset Connecticut, the No. 1 seed in the Mideast. ■

CAMPUS LIFE

As seen through the eyes of Nebraska gymnast Jason Hardabura

JASON HARDABURA, before deciding to compete as a gymnast for the University of Nebraska, planned to work at a ski resort in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The energetic and affable 23-year-old enjoys skiing and rock climbing. But he decided it was in his best interests to obtain a college degree.

Hardabura has schooled his gymnastics opponents most of this season. The Oakville, Ontario, native finished the regular season ranked first nationally in the all-around standings with an average score of 57.517. He was ranked in the top 20 in four events — horizontal bar (fourth, 9.775), still rings (ninth, 9.725), floor exercise (13th, 9.625) and pommel horse (14th, 9.717).



"I'm just taking it day by day, competition by competition," Hardabura said when asked if his success surprised him.

Hardabura showed he was ready for the April 22-24 NCAA Championships in Lincoln, Neb., by capturing the all-around at the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation Championships on March 28 in Norman, Okla. The MPSF is the equivalent of a conference meet for the Huskers since only one other Big 12 Conference school (Oklahoma) offers men's gymnastics.

Hardabura was named the MPSF's gymnast of the year.

"Winning the all-around was one thing, but getting chosen by your peers for gymnast of the year means a lot more to me," Hardabura said. He noted that teammate Marshall

Nelson, out this season with a knee injury, captured the award last year. "To be in the same league with someone like Marshall is a real pat on the back. But our team winning the MPSF title is the biggest thing."

Hardabura entered the season uncertain what, if any, effect an off-season thumb injury would have on his gymnastics. His thumb had to be pieced together after it was ripped off by a lawn mower.

Hardabura credits the Nebraska coaching staff for his success. He describes head coach Francis Allen, who has led the Huskers to eight national crowns, as "a motivator and politician and someone who obviously knows what it takes to win national titles."

Hardabura praises Jim Howard for his abilities as a planner and technician, and he lauds Chuck Chmelka for knowing the ins and outs of each Husker gymnast.

"This is a real good environment," said Hardabura, standing in a practice gym that has produced nine Olympians.

As grade-school student, Hardabura said, he drew inspiration from watching the 1984 Olympics, which featured ex-Huskers Jim Hartung, Jim Mikus and Scott Johnson. Hartung serves as a judge for many of NU's meets.

"He has a real love for the sport," Hardabura said. "You can tell when you're talking to him." ■

— As told to Steve Sipple

WHEN EVERYTHING'S ON THE LINE, WHO DO YOU COUNT ON?

There's nothing quite like the feeling of knowing that when a pressure situation arises, you've got a clutch performer on your team. Someone who's been there before. Someone who's put in the sweat and studied the films — and knows how to get it done.

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Making the Jump

**Former Husker's
work ethic helps
push junior Ingram
to next level**

By Mark Derowitsch

It's a common scene at Nebraska track practice: A young jumper spends time learning from a veteran, picking up pointers every chance she gets.

All throughout the indoor season, they were there, Nebraska's future side-by-side with Nebraska's past.

Junior Dalhia Ingram represents Nebraska's future. She's one of the top up-and-coming women's triple jumpers in the NCAA. In just 3 1/2 years, Ingram has earned four All-America awards and is listed as the third best leaper in school history.

Right beside her during training is Renita Robinson Tyrance, who is back in Lincoln and training in hopes of landing a spot on the 2000 United States Olympic team. She won the outdoor NCAA triple jump championship in 1989 and ranks second in the event in school history.

Some days, the two work out together.

Nebraska Coach Gary Pepin can't think of a more ideal arrangement.

"It's been a great situation for Dalhia," Pepin said. "Not only does she have somebody to push her, Dalhia can benefit from Renita's great work ethic. This is probably the best Dalhia has trained in her entire career, and I think being around Renita has a lot to do with it."

Ingram credits her sudden interest in serious workouts to maturity. She started triple jumping in high school, and acknowledges her first two years at Nebraska she was getting by on mostly her athletic ability.

Observing Robinson, a wife and mother, who, after a long break in serious training, is hoping to become the ultimate longshot to compete in the Olympics, changed her thinking.

"She's been great," Ingram said of Robinson. "Coach Pepin is a good coach and all, but I'm learning a lot from Renita. She's been through this before, so when she has something to say, I listen."

Ingram didn't finish the indoor season the way she wanted. She qualified for the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships in both the long and triple jumps, but the best she could do in Indianapolis was muster a 10th place finish in her top event. Ingram tripled-jumped 42 feet, 4 inches, but it was her second worst mark of the season.

However, that didn't spoil a good season. Her season-best was 42-8, which she leaped twice, the second time at the Big 12 Indoor



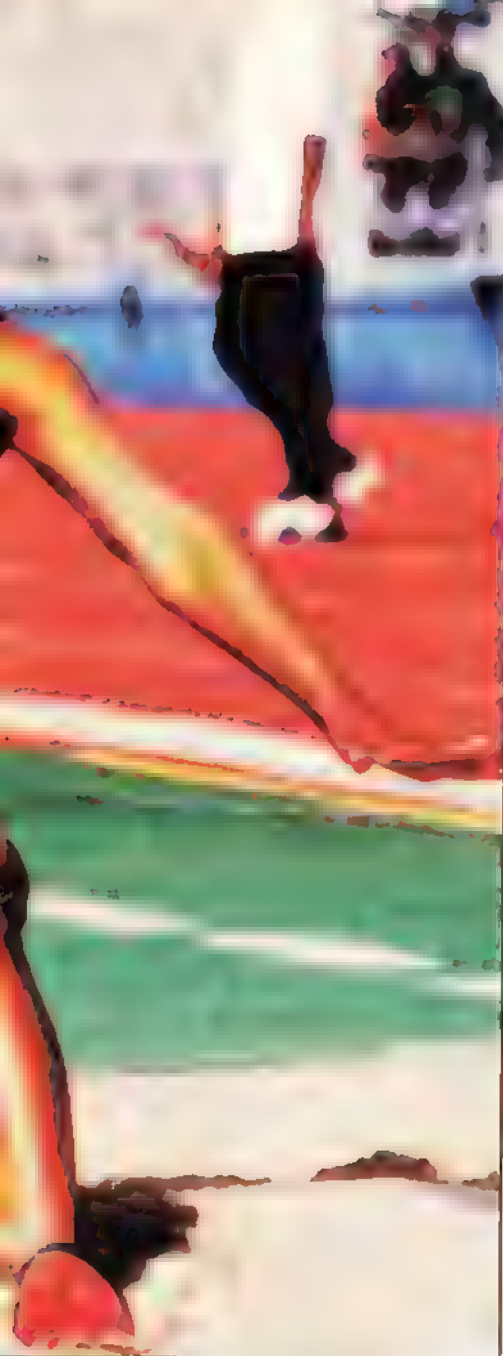
Junior Dalhia Ingram is the third best leaper in school history.

Championships. That was good enough for second place, behind Stacey Bowers of Baylor, who won with a mark of 45-1.

Ingram did, however, win the Big 12 indoor long jump. After struggling for much of the competition, she uncorked a jump of 20-1/4 on her second-to-last attempt to pull out the win.

"Dalhia really showed a lot of improvement this year," Pepin said. "I expect big things out of her."

Ingram doesn't lack for confidence. She realizes that at some point this season she'll let out a gasp-for-breath type of jump that



10 QUESTIONS

Huskers Illustrated talks with shortstop Leigh Suhr

As a true freshman with the Nebraska softball team, Leigh Suhr has tried to fill the shoes of All-American shortstop Ali Viola this season. The three-sport standout from Papillion-LaVista was asked about the struggles of playing as a freshman, about growing up as the daughter of successful football coach Gene Suhr and of her goals within a program that played in last year's College World Series.

Has your freshman season been the roller-coaster ride other first-year starters talk about?

I had expected troubles, and I definitely have faced some struggles, especially with the bat. I don't want to use an excuse as a freshman or anything because I know I can do it. It's just frustrating at times when I don't.

What's the biggest adjustment you've had to make since arriving to play at Nebraska?

From summer ball to college, the competitiveness just steps up so much. Instead of me just being the competitive one out there, now everyone is. It's like I'm playing against myself at every position.

How much did growing up in the house of a successful football coach influence you?

Even at home, we always have had little competitions. Sometimes if you're not getting the job done, and you just need the edge, your competitiveness is what gives you the edge. I was taught that, and I've always believed it.

You showed skills in basketball and soccer in high school, what made softball your favorite?

It just seemed to be so easy. In basketball, every day I would have to practice my three-pointers, my free throws, it was constantly something. In softball, I would get my repetitions, but everything was so natural.

Was it intimidating to come to Nebraska knowing you'd be asked to fill Ali Viola's shoes at shortstop?

I wasn't scared because we're two different types of players. I don't think I've ever looked at it as me going into Ali's spot because I'm not a home run hitter, and I won't be. I'm just looking to do what I can, and if I get the job done, that's great.

Besides your coaches, who do look to for help as a freshman?

I look a lot at how Lizama plays. She's a great example of what it takes to get the job done. She's competitive. She's high-energy. She has all the stuff that it takes to play this game. I definitely take notes from her.

I'm guessing it isn't a coincidence that you wear No. 8, the number worn by Baltimore Orioles iron man Cal Ripken?

He's just always been something big in my eyes. The way he carries himself, the way he presents himself is just great. He's a great ballplayer.

How do you present yourself?

I'm kind of a goof ball, but for me, it's good to carry that on the field because it keeps me relaxed. I like drama and I like being in plays, just community stuff, and skits. I was president of our athletic club and we went to elementary schools and did skits showing ways to do and not do things. It was fun.

And your biggest accomplishment as your high school's senior class president?

I think I was more the class clown than anything. But seriously, I just liked the leadership role and knowing that people depended on me not only in athletics but school-wise as well. I like the feeling that I can help someone, I guess.

It's three years until your senior season at Nebraska, but where do you see yourself in 2002?

I just want to be on top of my game before I get out of here. I have a dream of becoming an All-American and in the future maybe continue my play in some thing bigger. Those are my goals, and everyday I come out here, I'm working toward them.

— TODD HENRICHS



Freshman Leigh Suhr stepped in at shortstop.

could put her in contention for a top-five finish at the NCAA Outdoor Championships.

"I know I have some big jumps in me," said Ingram, a native of Liberal, Kan. "I don't know what I've got to do to get them out. I'm ready for them."

Perhaps Ingram's biggest thrill this year was competing against her younger sister, Christine. Christine Ingram is a freshman at Kansas State and is also a triple jumper.

They went head-to-head four times this year, with the older sister winning all four battles.

"I've never beaten her, except in my dreams," Christine said. "That's my big goal."

And, as Dalhia has proven, it will take a great effort to do it. ■

Early Start

By James Hale

Nebraska's recruiting stranglehold in-state continues to be so strong that most programs don't even bother to find out who the top prospects in the Cornhusker state really are.

The Huskers recruiting karma is so strong that they hadn't even finished spring practice and already had earned a verbal commitment from one of the top tight end prospects in the country.

Nebraska's first commitment of the 2000 recruiting class comes from Millard West tight end Chris Septak (6-foot-4, 235 pounds with 4.6 speed in the 40-yard dash), who set a Class-A record with 16 touchdown receptions last season.

"I have wanted to play at Nebraska for some time, and after going to their camps after my sophomore year, I liked what I saw," Septak said. "There was no need for me to look around. I knew that I was going to go there, so I wanted to get recruiting out of the way."

Septak is rated as one of the top five tight ends in the country, after catching 32 passes for 789 yards last season. Even though the Cornhuskers are throwing the ball more during the 90s, they are still not known as a passing team. That doesn't seem to bother Septak.

"I want to be a part of the Husker tradition, so catching the ball or blocking for a touchdown doesn't mean that much to me," Septak said. "When I moved into the state in the seventh grade, that was the first time I experienced Husker-mania. Going into my freshman year, I started thinking that would be a great place to go to, and I have never changed my mind about that."

Auburn, Tennessee, Ohio State, Notre Dame and USC have all shown an interest in Septak, which doesn't surprise Millard West Coach Dan McLaughlin.

"Nebraska is getting a great player with super speed and size," McLaughlin said. "When you are recruiting at the level of Nebraska,



Chris Septak is the first player to commit for the 2000 class.

you are looking for players with great physical dimensions like Chris. He can really run and is very explosive with a 36-inch vertical jump. Chris has very good hands and can catch the ball very well, which is also evident in basketball. He can do a lot of things on a football field. I think Nebraska is looking at him as a tight end, but he could play a lot of different positions. He's just a great athlete."

The commitment of Septak gets the Cornhusker recruiting class off to a great start. It's a given that the Huskers will come up with a top 25 recruiting class this year. But it's also a given that if they don't land in recruiting's top 10, fans begin to worry that Nebraska is losing ground in the college football scene.

This past Nebraska recruiting class was ranked 15th by the National Recruiting Advisor, 25th by Prep Star and 17th by Super Prep Magazine, three of the most recognized recruiting magazines in the country. The fact the Huskers aren't ranked in the nation's top 10 alarms many fans, but it doesn't mean Nebraska is slipping in recruiting.

"Nebraska had to almost rejuvenate its recruiting efforts once Tom Osborne retired and Coach (Frank) Solich stepped in," said National Recruiting Advisor editor Bobby Burton. "Coach Solich was an

aggressive recruiter as an assistant, but he takes on a different role as a head coach. Nebraska was in on a number of players from a number of different areas. I think they had a great year on the offensive and defensive lines, but fans may be uneasy because a marquee player didn't sign late with Nebraska. Still, they had a very good class, and Nebraska will get even better in recruiting in the future as Solich grows into the role as head coach."

Prep Star Magazine editor Rick Kimbro agreed.

"Under Solich, Nebraska is still doing the formula that the Cornhuskers have been doing since Bob Devaney," he said "Nebraska does things a little differently. They don't recruit off recruiting lists. They recruit off their own evaluations and don't care what the recruiting magazines say. They also recruit in unique areas like North and South Dakota for example, or Montana and Wyoming. If there is a player out there, no matter where they are, Nebraska will find them and make their own evaluation. The general public will be asking who that player is, but three years from now, he will be a very productive player for them, but not necessarily a player that helped them get a high recruiting rating."

Super Prep Magazine editor Allen Wallace said Nebraska is definitely still one of elite recruiting schools in the country.

"I think there is a misconception that you have to recruit a top 10 or top five recruiting class to be categorized as such," Wallace said. "Nebraska recruits hard, and they recruit early. One of the things they do better than anybody is find talent that is specifically geared for their program, and they focus on kids that are apt to strongly consider going to Lincoln. Sometimes they get a lot of early commitments, and then those kids drop out of the recruiting limelight and they don't get the attention as some of the other youngsters who sign late. Nebraska has demonstrated an expertise at recruiting kids

that fit their system. So, they may not get the highest recruiting class, because they recruit more for their needs, but they do such a good job of finding the perfect player for their recruiting classes, they usually get tremendous production out of each class."

Nebraska never has been ranked No. 1 in recruiting, but that didn't stop it from winning three national titles during the last five years. Prep Star has ranked the Huskers 8, 17, 10 and 25 from 1996 through 1999.

Super Prep ranked Nebraska No. 7 in 1987 and placed it 8, 4, 19, 17 and 17 from 1995 through 1999. The National Recruiting Advisor placed the Huskers 8, 6, 5, 6, 5, 9, 11, 10 and 15 from 1993 through 1999.

Recruiting rankings are unscientific, and every publication uses its own formula to come up with the polls.

"Rankings certainly aren't a true indication of how a team is going to do on the field, and you can never just figure in one class when evaluating how a team is going to do," Wallace said. "We have seen national champion teams that have recruited badly for one year, but that one bad year didn't sink them because the others around that bad class were so good that it carried that one bad year. Nebraska has such great tradition that kids they sign are developed to a greater degree than at some other schools."

Kimbrow said it's got to be a combination of classes that helps a program achieve its goals.

"All the classes ranked in the top 20 are so close," he said. "Even if Notre Dame is ranked No. 1, as it has been so many times it seems, everybody has to remember that Florida State has been ranked right behind them and maybe was No. 1 two years before Notre Dame. So, if a team is solid in the top 20 like Nebraska always is, they have recruited enough talent over a span of four years to win a national title."

Burton admits it's an inexact science.

"To be honest, there is no real formula for ranking recruiting classes," he said. "We have one, but I really don't think it is very good. How do you rate recruiting classes against each other, when each program has different needs."

So, fear not Husker fans. Don't get disillusioned by a ranking of 15 to 25. It's a game within a game, with the only result that matters played out in the fall. ■

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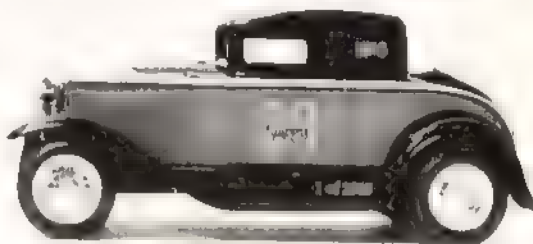
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The Line Was Drawn By 1994 'Pipeline'

Nebraska's offensive line shows 'a little bit more nastiness' in spring



MIKE BABCOCK

THE "PIPELINE" in 1994 forever changed the way Nebraska's offensive lines are regarded. Not only was it respected, it was celebrated and rightfully credited for its role in Tom Osborne's first national title. Because of it, the offense continued to click, despite three starting quarterbacks.

Their names were familiar: Zach Wiegert, Brenden Stai, Aaron Graham, Joel Wilks, Rob Zatechka. And they included an Outland Trophy winner, two All-

Americans and four future NFL players

The Cornhuskers had outstanding offensive lines prior to 1994, certainly. The 1982 line, for example, included two players who won three Outland Trophies and two Lombardi Awards between them. But the "Pipeline" was special, and is now the standard by which Nebraska's lines are measured.

The burden is considerable, as last season's offensive line learned. At times, it seemed, the line shouldered more than its share of responsibility for the Cornhuskers' well-documented offensive inconsistency, an inconsistency that translated into an unacceptable four losses.

The reasons for Nebraska's worst record in 30 years were more numerous, of course. But football fans, like everyone else, tend to expect simple explanations for complicated problems.

So when the Cornhuskers' rushing average dropped to the lowest since 1976, when the offense was built around the passing of Vince Ferragamo, the offensive line got most of the blame.

A lot of the attention on the line last season "wasn't nice. I mean, it was bad," offensive guard Russ Hochstein said as he prepared for spring practice. "But that goes with the territory. The good things are written and the bad things are written. It's just something you deal with, I guess."

James Sherman, also an offensive guard, dealt with the criticism by declining interviews during the spring. He didn't break his Denver Broncos-like media silence until a couple of days before the Red-White game, when he granted an interview request by the Lincoln Journal Star.

He didn't want to talk, Sherman said, "until we got something done."

Apparently Sherman and the other offensive linemen got quite a bit done during the spring. Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride fairly gushed about them following the Red-White game.

"I can speak from the defensive side because I see it as much as anybody," he said, unsolicited. "This probably is the most improved offensive line I've seen during the spring, that I've seen since I've been here. I mean, those kids ... a lot of people were kind of down on them, which was not right."

"But they really stuck together and continued to do it. They'll keep it up the whole summer, I know. I think they're going to have a great offensive line. If you're going to take one spot of improvement, I'd say from what I saw this spring, the offensive line (made) the biggest improvement we had."

Rush end Kyle Vanden Bosch was similarly complimentary of those against whom he lined up every day in practice during the spring. "I see a lot of talent there," he said. "We've got a lot of good players. They're really getting after it this year. It's a meaner bunch than we had last year."

"They're not afraid to go after your ankles and your kneecaps on any given play."

Tight end Tracey Wistrom, who has much in common with the interior linemen, agreed.

"I think there's a little bit more nastiness out here with the offensive line," he said. "It's something that I don't know if we necessarily lacked, but I don't know if we had enough of it. The offensive line, you've got to be nasty to play there. You've got to be dirty ... and get away with it."

Last season provided the offensive line with a "sense of urgency," said Dominic Raiola, who has settled in at center. "I mean, 9-4 hurts everybody, especially us. No matter how you look at it, it was put on us. We had a lot to do with it. And we want to make sure that it doesn't happen again."

Raiola has a sense of history. "The tradition here is great," he said. "People expect that because of the past lines, and we want to be like those lines. We don't want to be a

sore thumb that sticks out."

However it is to be accomplished, the offensive line must improve if Nebraska is to return to the top of the Big 12 and be a serious contender for the national championship. That's a given.

"We really want them to be a special group, a group that can come off the ball," Coach Frank Solich said following the Red-White game. "We want to be able to get back to where we're averaging 6 or so yards on first down. Some of our great teams have been able to do that."

Developing that was a focus of the spring. "We set out with that in mind, to make sure we ran the type of offense that would give those guys a chance to be physical and to try to establish inside-running, power plays as well as outside-type pitch plays. I think we progressed well with it," said Solich.

On offense, it's what's up-front that counts, as the "Pipeline" proved, beyond a doubt ■



Dominic Raiola knows about the offensive line tradition.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at mbb@netnebr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.



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